

Habakkuk 3:1-19

(Q & A with God – Part 3 – A Prayer of Praise)

Introduction-

- Review-
 - Historical Context:
 - The tribes of Israel have been divided between “Israel” and Judah because of Solomon's son's foolishness and immaturity.
 - There are bad kings and good kings, and Josiah was one of the good kings who led a revival in the land destroying idols and celebrating Passover again.
 - But then Josiah died and Jehoiakim is reigning, and there is much sin in the land.
 - Assyria is in the process of being conquered by the Babylonians/Chaldeans
 - Babylon has two distinct eras of history:
 - The *Old Babylonian Period* (2000 – 1600 BC) was characterized by the reign of Hammurabi, and ended when the Hittites invaded with horse-drawn chariots in 1595 BC
 - The *Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) Period* (625 – 539 BC) was began when the Chaldeans, who were a new Semitic group who had migrated to Babylonia, along with the Medes revolted against Assyrian dominion in 626 BC and 612 BC. This was 1,000 years after the Old Babylonian Period. Nebuchadnezzar (r. 605 – 562 BC) tried to build Babylon to its former glory, but soon after his death the empire was simply added to the growing Persian Empire.
 - The ruins at Babylon (south of Baghdad) spread across 2,100 acres. There was an inner city covering 1,140 acres which was surrounded by two walls; one being 21 ft thick and one being 12 ft thick with a 24 ft space between them filled with dirt (total = 57 ft thick).
 - God, in Habakkuk, said that they put their faith in their fortifications and love building their nest on high (Hab. 2:9-11). There were two more double walls outside this inner wall: one to the east and one to the north. When the Medo-Persians invaded, they broke through the northern wall and then were able to ransack the city relatively uncontested.
 - Nebuchadnezzar's palace covered 50 acres. There were 50 temples around his palace, along with shrines and other pagan idols.
 - This was a well-defended center for idolatry.

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- Question #1: Habakkuk asked God why He allows sin to go unpunished in Judah, because God promised that He would punish sin and unfaithfulness in Deuteronomy 28 (blessings and curses)
- Answer #1: God answered by saying that He was sending the Chaldeans to correct them – judgment
- Question #2: Habakkuk asked God why He was sending the Chaldeans – a more perverse and sinful people – for the sending of the Chaldeans seemed contradictory to what Habakkuk knew to be true about God
- Answer #2: God then answered and told Habakkuk that He knew the Chaldeans were evil, and the Chaldeans would one day receive their punishment as well
- The final chapter of this book is how Habakkuk responds to the Word of the Lord – it is a prayer
- Question: How does Habakkuk respond to the revelation of God? I believe this is a god model for how we should respond to the revelation of God.

1.) Fear God

Habakkuk 3:1-2 – “A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth. Lord I have heard the report about you and I fear. O Lord, revive your work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.”

- “Shigionoth”¹ refers to the fact that this prayer was to be sung – to be sung in the key of G?
 - Hab. 3:19 – at the end there is a note for the choir director to have the prayer sung to the playing of stringed instruments
- Habakkuk’s words to God
 - He has heard God’s words and his first response is the fear of the Lord
 - This is very similar to the response of Solomon after writing Ecclesiastes
 - Ecclesiastes is an evaluation of and conclusion to the life lived in pursuit of worldly things
 - Solomon considered: the cycles of life, human wisdom, pleasure, wealth, hard work, oppression, political success, and even false gods
 - Solomon concluded: “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

¹ Psalm 7’s heading has this word as well, but in the singular form: “Shiggaion”
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- Obviously important to Solomon – the wisest man who ever lived, who was not God
- Habakkuk then tells God to go about His work
 - Meaning – “carry out your punishment of us and then them” – the Judeans and the Babylonians
 - He trusts God’s work now and even asks that God make His work known – he is not embarrassed about what the Lord said He was about to do
 - At the end he says, “in wrath remember mercy,” which implies that he is not looking forward to the punishment of the Lord – he understands and fears the wrath of God
- Hab. 3:3-15 describes a theophany which is “an appearance of God” – God revealed Himself in a vision to Habakkuk and then Habakkuk wrote down what was shown to him.
 - “The passage forms the most extensive and elaborate theophany to be found in the OT”²
 - The purpose of the theophany was to reassure Habakkuk that God would crush the head of the wicked and deliver His people.

2.) Praise God

Habakkuk 3:3-15 – “God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. [Selah] His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of praise.”

“His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand and there is the hiding of His power. Before Him goes pestilence, and plague comes after Him. He stood and surveyed the earth; He looked and startled the nations. Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, the ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, the tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.”

“Did the Lord rage against the rivers, or was Your anger against the rivers, or was Your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, on Your chariots of salvation? Your bow was made bare, the rods of chastisement were sworn. [Selah] You cleaved the earth with rivers. The mountains saw You and quaked; the downpour of waters swept by. The deep uttered forth its voice, it lifted high its hands. Sun and moon stood in their places; they went away at the light of their arrows, at the radiance of Your gleaming spear. In indignation You marched through the earth; in anger You trampled the nations. You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for the salvation of Your anointed. You struck the head of the house of the evil to lay him open from thigh to neck. [Selah] You pierced with his own spears the head of his throngs. They stormed in to scatter us; their exultation was like those who devour the oppressed in secret. You trampled on the sea with Your horses, on the surge of many waters.”

² Achtemier, Nahum—Malachi, 56.

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- God's past omnipotence
 - Hab. 3:3 – Teman was a place in Edom (SE of Judah), and Paran was a mountainous wilderness area (SW of Judah) in the Sinai Peninsula (W of the Gulf of Aqaba)
 - This two places call the attention of the reader to the Exodus of the people of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness – it causes the reader to remember the past work of God
 - God had led them through the wilderness and was faithful to deliver them.
 - “His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise” – If God's power is seen in these desolate wildernesses, then He is most likely Lord over all the earth as well.
 - Hab. 3:5 – This verse speaks of how easily the Lord calls about plague and pestilence
 - This takes the reader back even further to the 10 plagues carried out on Egypt
 - The plagues not only served to force the Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go, but also to put God's power on display
 - God was using the Egyptians in the same way that he was using the Babylonians. It would be comforting to remember God's faithfulness to deliver His people then as well.
 - The Israelites were all about remembering the past in order to worship the Lord because of what he had done in His omnipotence and love.
- God's visual omnipotence
 - Hab. 3:4 – God's radiance and glory
 - Like the sunlight – like when you look at the sun (ex- Kindergarten sun glasses, shekinah glory doors in chapel at TMC)
 - There is the hiding of His power – this refers to His hands holding the flashing light
 - Hab. 3:6, 7 – God, the earth Quaker
 - The mountains quake when He looks at them (ex- “Casey, you look like a fish”, evil eye in class)
 - Nations were startled at Him
 - Huge mountains were shattered (ex- Mt. Rainier)
 - At this point, Habakkuk stops to acknowledge the eternity of God (cf. Hab. 1:12) – this attests to His everlasting omnipotence
 - Even the tents in Cushan and Midian (they were nomadic peoples) – no one is left out of the awe factor God causes
- God's purposeful omnipotence
 - Hab. 3:8 – sets up the question for His purpose

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- Can be read like this: “Were You mad at the water when you came riding on your chariots of salvation?” – “Did you come to thrash around in the water in anger?”
 - Writers in ancient times often referred to natural phenomena to describe something beyond their vocabulary
- “On your chariots of salvation” refers to how God was to come – like a powerful army
- *This is a temporary interruption in the theophany to ask a rhetorical question of God*
- This question is answered directly ahead in Hab. 3:13
 - God's coming is not for anger against the waters
 - “God is not coming to turn the Nile into blood, divide the Red Sea, or to stop up the Jordan.”³
 - God's coming should be understood as zeal for the salvation of His people

- List of God's actions: cleaved the earth making rivers, shook mountains, made oceans roar with high waves (explain: hands lifted high), sun and moon stood still (in response to the radiance of his gleaming arrows and spear), trampled the nations throughout the earth, slaughtered the enemy with their own weapons (Haman and Esther, Philistines), trampled the sea with horses
- Habakkuk looked to the past to see God's deliverance in the present.

3.) Fear God some more...

Habakkuk 3:16 – *“I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us.”*

- Habakkuk's response to the theophany – Hab. 3:16
 - Inward parts trembled
 - Lips quivered
 - Decay entered his bones
 - Trembling

³ Achtemier, *Nahum—Malachi*, 57.

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- He realizes that he must wait for the day when God would punish those who are coming to invade them
- How have others responded to the revelation of the Lord?
 - Job 28:28; 42:5-6
 - First Job defines what the fear of the Lord is and explains its importance (written before Proverbs 1:7)
 - Job asks God for an explanation of his life circumstances
 - God speaks, and Job is brought to repentance
 - Isaiah 6:1-8
 - Isaiah received a vision of the Lord and his response is clearly seen in Is. 6:5
 - He is even driven to willingness to serve in Is. 6:8
 - Jeremiah 20; 23:9
 - In Jer. 20, he is dealing with the fear of man, because he has brought a message⁴ to Judah that causes the people to mock him and beat him – read Jer. 20:7-13
 - The Lord is revealing much to Jeremiah about the condemnation of Judah as a nation, and even specific individuals within Judah – when he is being told about the false prophets in Judah, he records these words in Jer. 23:9
 - It is because of God's words that Jeremiah is moved.

 - Ezekiel 1:28; 3:23
 - Ezekiel is getting his call to be a prophet from the Lord and is seeing some very spectacular things
 - As the Lord is revealing His radiance to Ezekiel, Ezekiel responds by falling on his face in Ezek. 1:28
 - After God told Him to stand up and gave Ezekiel some more instruction, God showed Ezekiel the glory of the Lord and it caused him to fall on his face again in Ezek. 3:23
 - Daniel 10:7, 8
 - He is receiving a vision from the Lord and he was left with no strength and turned pale, and finally fell to the ground asleep – he passed out
 - Even those with him ran away and hid themselves, even though they did not see anything
 - Matthew 17:1-8
 - At the transfiguration, Jesus became radiant in His glory
 - Read it

⁴ The message he was bringing was the pending destruction of the Babylonians.

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- Acts 9:1-8
 - The conversion of Saul
 - Read it

4.) Trust God

Habakkuk 3:17-19 – *“Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my help, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places. [For the choir director, on my stringed instrument]”*

- How should we respond to the sovereign will of God?
 - Read it and explain it.
 - What more can be said?
- We should respond in pure trust that is beyond comprehension.

Conclusion-

- Habakkuk's progressive responses cannot be out of order – each one necessitates the existence of its predecessor save the first response
- There is no better way to end this book because this last chapter spells out for us how we should respond to the word of God.
- Habakkuk is a great example of someone who had a deep relationship with God, struggled with God, and was comforted by God as God revealed Himself to Habakkuk.
- Habakkuk was not only comforted by God, and had his questions answered, but he also was brought to fear, praise, and trust.

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Q: Even though God does not work in the same way (i.e. – spectacular theophanies) today that He did in Bible times, what are some things that should cause us to respond to God the same way Habakkuk did?

Q: How should we respond to the word when we read it?

Q: Why would fearing God lead to praising God?

Q: Why would praising God lead to trusting God?

Q: How can we best put ourselves in a position to fear God, then praise God, then trust God?